Until this has become clear, it seems that our life is all past and future, and that the present is nothing more than the infinitesimal hairline which divides them. From this comes the sensation of “having no time,” of a world which hurries by so rapidly that it is gone before we can enjoy it. But through “awakening to the instant” one sees that it is the reverse of the truth: it is rather the past and future which are the fleeting illusions, and the present which is eternally real. We discover that the linear succession of time is a convention of our single-track verbal thinking, of a consciousness which interprets the world by grasping little pieces of it, calling them things and events. But every such grasp of the mind excludes the rest of the world, so that this type of consciousness can get an approximate vision of the whole only as a series of grasps, one after another. Yet the superficiality of this consciousness is seen in the fact that it cannot and does not regulate even the human organism. For if it had to control the heartbeat, the breath, the operation of the nerves, glands, muscles, and sense organs, it would be rushing wildly around the body taking care of one thing after another, with not time to do anything else. Happily, it is not in charge, and the organism is regulated by the timeless “original mind,” which deals with life in its totality and so can do ever so many “things” at once.

Alan Watts
*The Way of Zen*
New York: Vintage; 1989

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